From: NewsAgent@aol.net
Date: 95-10-18 14:13:49 EDT

By Charles Aldinger
WASHINGTON (Reuter) - Sprawling Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, where critical
Bosnia peace talks will begin October 31, is more noted for its alleged dealings with
space-tripping aliens than for international diplomacy.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher announced Wednesday that the base, site of early flights
by aircraft pioneers Orville and Wilbur Wright, had been picked for talks involving the presidents
of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia.

Christopher and other officials said Wright-Patterson was picked for three reasons: well-guarded
gates to keep reporters away, good housing facilities for heads of state and location of only an
hour's flying time from Washington.

With 23,000 personnel, the base is near Dayton in southwestern Ohio about 60 miles northeast
of Cincinnati. It is both the largest employer in the area and the largest Air Force base in the
United States.

Although named for earlier aviators -- Frank Patterson was a military flier killed in a crash in
1918 -- the base has been associated in myth and fact with Project Blue Book, a U.S. Air Force
investigation into Unidentified Flying Objects.

Despite denials and an official report issued by the government in 1994, reports circulated by
UFO fans continue to hold that the Air Force has bodies of extraterrestrial visitors stored in
tunnels or frozen in lockers at the base.

The reports circulate on the Internet and have been fodder for books, Hollywood films and
television.

Much of the speculation involves a 1947 incident at Roswell, New Mexico, in which a supposed
``flying saucer'' crash was investigated. The Air Force issued a 25-page report in 1994 saying an
analysis of photos showed it was nothing more than wreckage from a balloon used to check the
atmosphere for possible soviet nuclear tests.

But rumors have persisted that bodies of aliens were retrieved at the site and

brought back to
Wright-Patterson, and that the base has been the site of other secret research on alien visitors.

Beyond rumor, the base has played a major role in U.S. military history. In recent years the B-2
Stealth bomber program was handled from there under wraps of secrecy.

Guards are posted at all gates to the 8,145-acre facility and only military personnel and those
with passes or business on the base are allowed to enter.

``It's a well-secured facility by virtue of limited access,'' said Air Force Major Clemens Gaines at
the Pentagon. ''There are also other security means. If someone goes over the fence, I don't think
it would go unnoticed.''

The peace talks will not be the base's first brush with the Balkan conflict. It announced earlier this
month that its Medical Center will set up an interactive television link with Camp Pleso in Croatia
for analysis of X-ray and other medical reports on wounded U.N. peacekeepers treated at the
camp.

The three key participants in the so-called ``proximity talks'' will be Presidents Slobodan
Milosevic of Serbia, Franjo Tudjman of Croatia and Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia. They will be
joined by senior officials from the Contact Group, comprising the United States, Britain, France,
Germany and Russia, which has been pursuing a peace deal.

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns told Reuters the Ohio air base had three identical
generals' quarters to house the presidents and excellent recreational facilities.

``It can house all 200-plus people (involved in the peace talks), it has a nice conference center
where they can meet and it also has someplace where they can walk. There's a golf course
behind the part of base where they will be,'' he said.

Burns said a ``partial news blackout'' would be in effect. Journalists will be allowed to record the
opening of the talks on October 31 but news briefings will be held in Washington.

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